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THE PROGRESSIVE IMPROVEMENT OF
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B E I N G
THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION OF 1688.

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S E R M O N.

J O B v. 12.

HE DISAPPOINTETH THE DEVICES OF THE
CRAFTY, SO THAT THEIR HANDS CANNOT
PERFORM THEIR ENTERPRISE.

THE language of Eliphaz, in this and other expressions in the same chapter, is very unequivocal and strong. By the “devices of the crafty”, we must understand the schemes and projects which are founded in deceit, injustice and oppression, and conducted by means which can only be approved by such mischievous schemers and projectors. Craftiness, in common speech, carries, in its very sound, something that is detestable in itself, because it conveys no other idea but that of plotting against things fair and honourable. It necessarily has duplicity and

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baseness for its principle ; and is only employed to obtain some object that is unjust in the end. It is a low and grovelling cunning which is never found but in weak and wicked minds, devoted to the accomplishment of some sinister and unworthy design, under the feigned pretence of sagacity and wisdom ; or an assumed and affected openness of temper. The actors of this character are, however, obliged to move in the dark, for their deeds are evil ; and they sleep not, unless they betray some ; they are compelled also to be uniform hypocrites, or craftiness would lose its name, and defeat its only object.

In private life, we have seen this baseness, (how much soever it is scouted,) become the successful bane and destruction of private happiness, by imposing on the willing credulity of others with such low arts and falsehoods, as would deservedly expel such practitioners from all social intercourse with man. Yet though fatally successful in innumerable cases, it is generally considered as a proof of a weak understanding, as well as of a wicked heart. The mischief such a character does in society, is the mischief of an incendiary, who by throwing a firebrand into one house may burn a city to ashes : and thus he who is not capable of assist-
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ing others by the counsel of his head, or the labour of his hands, may reduce thousands to distress and ruin.

Such an one, who is a more dangerous enemy to the social comforts of life, than the plague is to the health of mankind, can never assume to himself the fortitude of mind and ingenuous countenance of the virtuous man. He may, covertly, or circuitously, attempt to apologize, and to vindicate himself, but the tongue of the slanderer and the deceiver will falter, and his visage will be confounded. He may make his appeal by oaths, but they will fall from his mouth without effect, except indeed to be recorded to his own confusion.

On the great theatre of public life, the same base spirit is not seldom abroad and active, and found in company with those, who, of all others, ought to be the last to associate with the crafty or take counsel with the deceiver. But it is no sooner suspected, than it is, in part, disarmed; it is no sooner discovered, than its patrons lose the public opinion and confidence in their measures, however wise; and are themselves finally compelled to sit down under the loss of all credit and reputation, when they shall afterwards speak

the truth, or act with wisdom and integrity. So many eyes, which look not through a partial medium, are upon every public character, that suspicion follows close at the heels of craftiness, and discovery generally overtakes it. Like a city situated on an hill, in such situations, it cannot be hidden. If it succeeds for once, it succeeds no more. For when a man deceives me once, it is *his* fault; but if he is suffered to deceive me a second time, I share the fault with him, to say the least: and a merely political argument would prove that I made it wholly my own. This observation will apply as forcibly to the world at large, as to individuals.

Whether we consider the violent alarm which Paul spread among the silver-smiths of Ephesus who were employed in making silver-shrines for Diana, when he *persuaded many people that they were no gods, which were made with hands, and became full of wrath, and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians,"* (Acts xix.) which, in other words, is the true spirit of *priest-craft*. Or, whether we turn our attention to that artificial sophistry and chicanery which our James the first, in the heighth of his royal folly, honoured with the name of *king-craft*;—they are equally, in the end, the destruction of
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the power they were intended to preserve and to perpetuate.

It is a part of our present disquisition, to inquire further, how we are to understand the appropriation of this disappointment of the *devices of the crafty*, to the immediate hand of God, who is here said to defeat them, by not suffering them *to perform their enterprise*.

This, and an almost infinite number of similar expressions in the old and new Testament, should be so construed and understood as to be consistent with the proper government of God and the responsibility of man for his actions. God is said by Job, *to pour contempt upon princes, and to weaken the strength of the mighty*. (xii. 21.) And the psalmist observes, in a song of thanksgiving, that, *if it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up alive*. (cxxiv. 2 and 3.)—In both these places, God is not to be supposed specially, and independently of their proper cause, to bring contempt upon the one, or fight by the side of the other, as we should speak of our fellow-creatures. Neither are we to presume that his thoughts and schemes are particularly diverted to the right hand or to the

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left, by any extraordinary and occasional efforts to accomplish and apply these chastisements of the sons of men; but that he brings all these things to pass by the ordinary system of his government; by connecting, sooner or later, the just effect with its proper cause, in the great and perfect scale of his providence, though we cannot fathom his counsels; by making the whole of his dispensations to fulfill the great purposes of trial and discipline; of reward or punishment; of example and encouragement to the good, and of terror to evil-doers, as the behaviour and occasions of mankind require. Thus we see, the wisdom of man, is foolishness with God; and the wise are, oftentimes, taken in their own craftiness. (Job v. 13. and 1 Cor. iii. 19.)

Upon every extraordinary and memorable occasion we are all very apt to exclaim with the psalmist, *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.* (Ps. cxviii. 23. also Matt. xxi. 42. and Mark. xii. 11.) The sentiment is just and true in the abstract; but, it not seldom happens, that many of us, who use this and such-like prompt expressions upon particular occasions, do greatly misconceive their proper import. Thus, for instance, the rising of the sun is the Lord's doing, but because we observe its regular

regular diurnal return, we do not so emphatically ascribe its course to the one great cause of all things, as we do events which are more rare and uncommon, and which come upon us unexpected and by surprise.

We may indeed be told, that *it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in princes.* (Pf. cxviii. 9.) The weakness and instability of the highest distinctions among men are here contrasted with the power and integrity of God; and the trust which we are recommended by the psalmist to place in God, is not a blind reliance upon him to help and assist us without our own endeavours, but that our best endeavours to do the will of God will be promoted and assisted by the constitution of things, which he hath ordained, in some way, unknown to us, and unsearchable by us, but which will ultimately fulfill his great and chief purpose, the general happiness of all his creatures.

We are also frequently too much disposed to interpret some dispensations into marks or tokens of the immediate approbation of heaven, and others into wrathful judgments; while they
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are the result of natural and necessary causes in the very constitution of things.

One, if not the chief, reason of this misapprehension of the cause of the great events in the history of mankind, is our presuming, that because they exceed our limited expectation, and have taken us unawares, therefore, they are the work of a moment, a day, or a year. But the careful observer of the history of the world will find all great national events to have advanced gradually to a crisis, to have struggled with many difficulties in their progress, and their causes to have been accumulating for ages. It is in this view, the establishment of liberty or tyranny, in each nation respectively, has been the natural fruit of the tree which God hath originally equally permitted to be planted and watered.

If we look into the history of our own country we shall find this fact fully established. The settlement of the government under Henry the seventh, was the result of the power and spirit of the people being exhausted in the continued wars between the greater barons for upwards of two centuries, for no greater or better reason than which branch of the same house should occupy the throne. The object of these intestine
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and bloody commotions was trifling, and the pretence for terminating them, (because of a marriage between the representatives of the contending parties,) was a reason as unimportant and inadequate as the object itself was trifling. If we look for the true cause of the decapitation of the first Charles and the expulsion of the second James, it will not be confined merely to the intolerant bigotry of the one, or the faithless hypocrisy of the other, but will be found in the successive and accumulated oppressions of the Tudor and Stuart families, which had wearied the submission of a patient people.

Again. The reformation is not solely to be ascribed to the caprice, much less to the virtue or religion of the eighth Henry, but to the continued overbearing temper of the papal hierarchy, which had, for several centuries, insulted our liberties, and to the large endowments of the monasteries, which had greatly exhausted the people's coffers, and had monopolized for the service of idleness and vice more than their share of the comforts of life.

The glorious revolution, whose anniversary returns as on this day, did not originate with
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those who were the happy instruments in establishing it, but sprang from a series of oppressions, which the people suffered under the four preceding reigns, each of which may successively be distinguished by the characters of pendency, of hypocrisy, of profligacy, and of bigotry. These, at length, roused the sleeping lion, and once more renovated and invigorated the principles of liberty in our island. Yet this was, properly speaking, no way marvellous in our eyes, but the natural effect of many conspiring causes; and a repetition of the same or similar abuses and disgraceful scenes, would produce the same resistance. We should not, therefore, now, any more than our ancestors formerly, have to wait to know the will of God, by any signal, or miraculous, declaration of it, whether it would be approved by him. We must, in such case, as heretofore, enquire of the people by what rule, and by whom, they would be governed; and their answer is the voice of God. Thus a popular government is the nearest a-kin to a theocracy; and the only indefeasible right to govern, appertains to their appointment. Such is our constitution; and these are the principles which have given to our princes a dignity unknown in arbitrary and absolutely hereditary governments.

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The example which this country hath heretofore set to the nations of Europe, on various occasions, hath been contemplated with horror by the feudal despots, while it has been looked up to with reverence and envy by the friends of freedom through the world.—Other countries are disposed to adopt the general principles of our government; but they will, as each shall see occasion, improve upon our system; and, by a purer policy, carefully avoid those errors into which some original defects have involved us. The use and abuse of the best political institutions will respectively give us the possession and enjoyment of the greatest degree of social and private happiness, or their contrary. The security of all that is valuable in this life, and more especially under the present increase of religious and political knowledge, depends upon the actual, not the ideal or hypothetical enjoyment, of that liberty in religion, wherewith Christ hath left us free; and that liberty, in civil matters, which is derived from men being, by honest and universal representation, their own legislators.—May it, therefore, be the honour and glory, as it would be the highest wisdom of Britain, to correct every defect in her political constitution, and every abuse which the hand of time hath engrafted upon the labours of our forefathers.

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These being accomplished by the public virtue of her citizens, (and there is only one paramount and common interest which should unite us all,) would bring down the blessings of millions on the heads of those who shall achieve so good and glorious a work ; permanent peace and prosperity, and assured liberty would then be the portion of our children, and our childrens' children ; and the highest earthly honor would irradiate the brow of him who should be dignified with the executive government.

The invasion of the liberties of France by a leagued conspiracy of foreign force, hath, happily for the liberties of all mankind, been hitherto repelled. I say, happily for the liberties of all mankind, for the great principles, that "every nation is competent to settle its own government," and that "it is sufficient reason for any form to be adopted that the people will it so to be," will now be universally received as axioms in the practice, as well as theory, of politics. Like the water that washes their coast and unites it with the most distant parts of the globe, the principles and blessings of a free government will travel to, and unite with, every inhabited region of the earth. America has already redeemed herself from colonial oppression,
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and erected herself into free and united states : and she now rises accordingly to that dignity among the nations of the earth to which her virtues give her an undoubted title. Poland, indeed, had no sooner established a free government, through the virtue of a patriot king, than it was despoiled of its liberty, by the piratical despotism of a neighbouring tyrant. But time, I am persuaded, will effect what unassisted internal resources have, for the present, been unable to accomplish. And, it is to be hoped, for the benefit of one part of mankind, and the admonition of the other, that the despotic conduct of the plunderers will, ere long, upon themselves recoil, and afford another example of the price that must finally be paid by one nation intermeddling with the internal government of another, with which it has no concern whatever.

France is indeed yet subject to the fluctuating fortune of war, and to the internal dissensions incidental to such great events, and these constitute a very severe trial and scrutiny of the spirits of men. The many thousands of the friends of freedom, who have fallen, since foreigners have invaded and penetrated their country, have so recently perished, that it yet damps the impulsive joy at the triumphs of liberty. The loss of
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the deluded followers of tyrants cannot be observed with indifference. But if there is one ingredient in the social happiness of man, which is above all price, it is genuine uncorrupted liberty ; we may, therefore, venture to assert that these victims of the ambition of their leaders, had been much better sacrificed in redressing their own wrongs, than in plundering and endeavouring to enslave their neighbours. The slaughter, however, which they have alternately committed and suffered, will put to eternal shame that wretched system of policy which spills the kindred blood of nations, because of the alliance of one single family with another, or carries fire and sword into a neighbouring country under pretence of balancing the political powers of this world.

But, while we deplore the waste of human blood and treasure, and execrate the murderers and plunderers of mankind, we should quiet our wakeful apprehensions with the consideration that all things will terminate in such a manner as shall be most conducive to the true happiness of the human race. The uncertainty of war forbids premature security ; and the decisive proof how far any people deserve the liberty for which they contend, is the use they make of

that portion which they obtain. For the sake of humanity, may the war be speedily concluded; and for the sake of justice, may those who have bravely fought for freedom, securely enjoy its blessings in peace. And let me add, may the people, who have been successful in the field, be virtuous and wise in the senate: when they, who so nobly went forth to fight the battles of liberty, shall be permitted to return the sword into its scabbard, may they be as strongly impressed with the just demands of humanity.

It is indeed said on the authority of an apostle, *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shall receive to themselves condemnation.* (Rom. xiii. 1 and 2.) But, when we consider that the *powers that be* are only then *the ordinance of God*, when they are approved by the people governed, (from whom all power necessarily originates, and in whom alone it exists on earth,) the exploded doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance, which have been proclaimed by tyrants and preached by priests, will be found to have no more agreement with the doctrine of the apostle, than Christ hath with Belial.

Belial. No two things can be more opposite to each other, than the spirit of slavery and the spirit of the gospel. With the different modes of government subsisting in the world at the time the gospel was preached, it took no concern, as such : but where the spirit of the gospel is, there is liberty. (2 Cor. iii. 17)

—Civil institutions, where they are formed upon the expressed agreement, or implied consent, of their subjects, are left to enforce the social and reciprocal duties which they create. But where imperious conquest or gradual incroachments have imposed the law or rule of action, there can be no better justification for throwing off the galling yoke, than the first practical opportunity that offers. And all the jargon and nonsense which hath been retailed upon the contrary supposition, whether pretended to be founded in the scripture, in acts of the legislature, or in charters, are now mouldering in the dust with their respective advocates, except when they are revived by the aspirants to place and power on the anniversaries of the pretended martyrdom of the tyrant hypocrite, or the restoration of his profligate son.

These reflections may afford us abundant cause of rejoicing in what was done for us, as on this
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day, by the wisdom and virtue of our ancestors. At the same time, it should not be concealed, that while we profess to be grateful for what we have received from our fore-fathers, we ought to be zealous to leave to our posterity this fair inheritance not only unimpaired, but improved. It is a duty attached to our own enjoyment of these blessings; they have, therefore, a right to expect this at our hands. The stake is so very important, the duty so clearly obligatory, and the time to speak on the nature and value of our rights so seasonable, that it would have been highly pusillanimous to have been wholly silent, and very disingenuous to have expressed these sentiments in ambiguous terms. The description and measure of that liberty which would secure the most extensive blessings to this country, would, at once, include and preserve both prince and people in all their civil, and equally in all their religious rights.

How elevated in the rank of nations would Britain be, if once her people were restored to their just and equal share in one branch of the legislature! We should soon observe the dogmatism of established theology and the chicanery of law to disappear; our code of criminal law to forward the reformation of morals, more
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than to thirst for the execution of its wretched subjects ; the heavy burdens raised from the very dregs of taxation, and all oppressive restraints on personal liberty would be lessened ; the traffic in human flesh would no longer be balanced in the scale of a supposed advantageous commerce : and, when we should behold the rest of the nations of the world enjoying the means and measure of political happiness, which they severally chose for themselves, (however specifically differing from our own,) we should all rejoice with them as fellow-men and brethren. Every day would then *disappoint the devices of the crafty, so that their hands could not perform their enterprise.* Under the enjoyment of perfect liberty, nation would no longer rise against nation ; wars would cease throughout the earth. The reign of liberty, would be the reign of happiness.

T H E E N D.

